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23 July 2019

THE PRIME MINISTER

*Dear Mr Wright*

Thank you for your letter of 5 July. I would like to update you on the progress of discussions between the Devolved Administrations to consider how to improve parity of financial support for infected and affected people across the UK.

Jackie Doyle-Price, Minister for Mental Health, Inequalities and Suicide Prevention, held a meeting on 10 July with: Joe Fitzpatrick MSP, Minister for Public Health and Wellbeing, Julie Morgan AM, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, Richard Pengelly, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health in Northern Ireland and Sue Gray, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the lead sponsoring official of the Infected Blood Inquiry.


The meeting agreed that the integrity of the schemes developed under devolution should be respected, in recognition that the four schemes have evolved to address the needs of their respective beneficiary communities, in dialogue with those communities. It also agreed that all four nations are committed to achieving parity of support, while recognising that what is meant by the term parity will need refinement and goes above and beyond financial support alone. As progress is made in improving the schemes and achieving parity of support, the meeting was clear that no beneficiary of any country's scheme will be made worse off, both in terms of financial and other types of support.

To make progress on the basis of these principles, there is a need to acknowledge some complexity. Parity of financial payments is not, for example, the same as parity in how beneficiaries are assessed, or parity of other elements of support, such as counselling. Given this spectrum of how parity between schemes might be interpreted, and the importance of getting this right for all involved, the meeting agreed that further evaluation is needed before we move forward with any changes. As part of this, Cabinet Office officials will be in touch to arrange further meetings with you and the Infected Blood Inquiry about the best way to address these complexities.

At the meeting, those representing Wales and Northern Ireland spoke of how the recent uplift in financial support for those in England has caused an inadvertent disparity between the English scheme and those of Wales and Northern Ireland, which is a matter of immediate concern and distress for their infected and affected communities. As a result of the meeting, dialogue is now underway between the Cabinet Office, Department of Health and Social Care and HM Treasury in order to resolve this immediate and pressing disparity as soon as possible.

Each of the four Administrations remains committed to cooperating fully with the Infected Blood Inquiry, and to making progress on Sir Brian's call for greater parity. It is very important that the Government moves quickly to achieve parity between the English support scheme and the schemes in Northern Ireland and Wales, and that consultation between the four nations of the UK can proceed as quickly as thoroughness allows so that we can make good our commitment to achieving comprehensive parity of support.

I am very grateful for the significant contribution made by you and your co-signatories towards addressing this important issue. I have every confidence that my successor as Prime Minister will continue to provide the Infected Blood Inquiry with all the support that it needs to complete its work, and that the Inquiry will provide the answers that you and all of those infected and affected have waited so long for.

*Yours sincerely*  


Mr Bill Wright